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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/16/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN POLITICS: PUTIN STUMPS FOR, STOMPS  
ON, UNITED RUSSIA

REF: A. MOSCOW 5410

[1](#)B. MOSCOW 5417

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reason: 1.4 (d).

#### Summary

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[1](#)1. (SBU) With just over two weeks remaining until the December 2 Duma elections, Putin, during a visit to Krasnoyarsk, at last began actively stumping for the United Russia party. On November 15, in Tver, about 700 delegates from 79 of Russia's regions returned the favor by actively stumping for Putin as "national leader." The Russian Orthodox Church is scheduled to board the Putin bandwagon, if there is room, at a meeting with the President scheduled for November 19. The latest polling indicates that United Russia with 67 percent of the vote, the Communist Party with 14 percent and, possibly, LDPR (6 percent) will win representation in the Duma. A party that will not make it --SPS-- escalated its attacks on Putin in a continuing series of televised debates (ref a). The Central Election Commission invited a smaller-than-expected number of ODIHR observers to its elections, and ODIHR decided not to come. End summary.

#### Putin Stumps for YR

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[1](#)2. (SBU) During a November 13 visit to Krasnoyarsk, Putin at last began stumping for the party --United Russia (YR)-- he will lead into the December 2 election. Putin's belated support for YR followed polls indicating that the party's ratings had slumped since his October 1 agreement to occupy positions one, two, and three on YR's federal list. Since that time, Putin had urged the heads of municipalities and Muslim spiritual leaders to get their constituents to the polls but had done little to promote YR. His decision to campaign in Krasnoyarsk was no doubt a bittersweet one for YR's leadership, as Putin used the occasion to acknowledge that the campaign had foundered and that many YR members were opportunists. Still, the President acknowledged, "we have nothing better" than YR and, anyway, in voting for YR you are showing "than you trust me." While Putin urged voters to substantiate electorally his "moral authority," he continued to play coy on what, if any, position he might assume post-presidency. Putin again said that a mandate for YR was necessary to ensure that progress Russia had made on his watch would not be undermined.

#### "For Putin" Stumps For Putin

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[1](#)3. (SBU) On November 15, 700 delegates from 79 regions gathered in Tver to attend the founding congress of the "All-Russian Movement 'For Putin'." The delegates elected a

coordinating committee of seven persons from each Federal district and three co-chairpersons: lawyer Pavel Astakhov, who appears to have been a motivating force behind many of the "spontaneous" "For Putin" rallies around Russia that preceded the Tver event; surgeon Renat Akchurin; and milkmaid Natalya Agapova. Delegates also adopted an appeal, which says that Putin should continue as a national leader who "will determine the nation's strategic development and ensure the continuity of state policy." The appeal takes a cue from Putin in Krasnoyarsk in refusing to identify Putin's post-presidential role, saying only that "he will identify his place in the national political system after the elections." The next "For Putin" event is scheduled for November 21 in Moscow. It is not clear how the organization will use the 30 million signatures it has allegedly collected on Putin's behalf. YR's electoral fund footed the bill for the Tver event. Immediate reaction to the event was negative, with 45 percent of those polled having a negative or very negative reaction to the concept of "national father," a sign -- prominent newspaper editor Pavel Gusev said -- that not all Russians are idiots.

14. (SBU) The media report that the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) may on November 19 be asked by Putin to urge parishioners to go to the polls on December 2. Commentators note that the Church played a similar role in backing Boris Yeltsin in the 1996 elections. ROC backing, if it extended explicitly to Putin, would add to the trans-party mandate for the President that some appear to be attempting to build via movements like "For Putin."

Latest Polls: YR, KPRF Certain Winners  
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15. (SBU) The Levada Center on November 16 released the  
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results of a poll conducted November 9 - 13. Levada's latest numbers predict that 63 percent of voters will go to the polls on December 2. United Russia at 67 percent will be the chief beneficiary of their efforts. Only one other party, the Communists at 14 percent, seems assured of Duma representation, while Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's LDPR, currently at 6 percent, may squeak by. Sergey Mironov's Just Russia appears to have an outside chance of crossing the seven-percent threshold, but its already slight popularity has slumped further since Levada's last poll, from five to four percent. The Levada poll has a three percent margin of error.

16. (SBU) Not surprisingly, Levada's poll confirmed that most Russians view the December 2 elections as an affirmation of the status quo. High on their list of expectations was a party that would support state subsidies to citizens and the "symbolic image of a strong state." A large number prefer order to democratic rights and, in a response that may go hand-in-hand with that preference, 48 percent are persuaded that these will be imitation elections, with "the authorities," not the voters, determining their outcome.

SPS: Throwing Haymakers  
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17. (SBU) The Union of Right Forces (SPS) escalated its rhetoric (reftels) during a week that saw further defections from party ranks, SPS's decision to participate in a November 24 Other Russia anti-government rally, and an SPS appeal to the Supreme Court, alleging that Putin should be de-listed for using his office to openly campaign for YR. The week's developments demonstrated the degree of the party's estrangement from a Kremlin it had worked hard, in the early days of the campaign, to forge an agreement with. The party will not win representation in the Duma, but it has pioneered the use of government-controlled television to openly criticize the cult of personality it alleges has formed around Putin, and to warn of the increasing sovietization of

Russian political life.

#### ODIHR Pulls Monitors

18. (SBU) The MFA reacted to ODIHR's November 16 announcement that it would not be sending election observers by alleging that ODIHR was itself responsible for the problems with accreditation and noting that the GOR would not "over dramatize" the situation -- a view that has been picked up by ruling party supporters, including Duma International Relations Chairman Konstantin Kosachev. The decision to pull out followed the GOR's decision to limit the number of observers to seventy. The Central Election Commission's Igor Borisov expressed surprise at ODIHR's decision and iterated the CEC's willingness to provide full support to the ODIHR mission.

#### Comment

19. (C) With just over two weeks remaining until voters go to the polls, it is unlikely that there will be any major changes in the expected outcome of the election. LDPR seems at this juncture more likely than Just Russia to find its way into the Duma, as its six percent is well within the margin of error and LDPR has historically finished strongly. Still, Just Russia has friends in high places, is within striking range of seven percent, and cannot be ruled out. SPS's decision to join Other Russia's November 24 meeting but, as SPS Chairman Belykh noted on November 16, not Other Russia itself, may create pressure on the authorities to squelch a meeting they have given a greenlight to. Staying their hand may be the GOR's condemnation of the Georgian government's crackdown on street action in Tbilisi last week, although provocations, and a tough response, cannot be excluded on November 24.

110. (C) Although the "For Putin" movement appears to have YR sponsorship, indications we have received from other quarters suggest it is not a Kremlin initiative, and may be nothing more than another flat-footed attempt by the party to direct public attention to the central plank of its platform: a vote for YR is a vote for the President. The key question remains unanswered: what does Putin intend to do with the mandate he will receive on December 2?

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